

# THE COLLECTED JOURNEY

## ISSUE 1: IN THE BEGINNING

*As part of our 50th year celebration, I am going to share with you six of the milestone events that have shaped our organization into the company we know today. There will be one new tribal story every sixty days in 2018. Trans-Matic has an interesting history. We have a lot to celebrate after 50 years.*

*Pat Thompson*

# IN THE BEGINNING

After graduating from college, I worked for a small deep draw manufacturing company in Chicago, Drawn Metal Products, from 1962 to 1968. It was a good company owned and managed by a wonderful gentleman, Joe Zapf. I learned a lot working out in the shop for over a year before working in purchasing and sales. Joe was getting ready to sell the company to our biggest customer, so I decided to move on.

When I couldn't find another job paying the money I was making, I decided to start my own business, Trans-Matic. The decision to start out in Holland, Michigan was one of the best decisions we ever made. We had a good workforce with Boy Scout virtues, low cost of living and close access to industrial markets throughout the Midwest.

**“is was a humble beginning”**

Nevertheless, it was a humble beginning. We sold our house in Chicago, cashed in a few modest investments and borrowed funds from our family to start the business. It was easy to sell for Drawn Metal Products, but there was resistance to selling for a start-up like Trans-Matic. We were new, inexperienced, and undercapitalized. My family went eighteen months without a paycheck. I worked part-time weekend jobs to put food on the table. It would take six years to get back to what I was earning at my previous job. We worked nonstop six and seven days a week for six years before we could afford to take our first vacation. It was a stressful period of exhausting work and economic uncertainty. It took ten years of sweat equity before the business was properly capitalized and we came close to bankruptcy twice during that start-up period.

A college buddy, Art Brandenburg, a CPA with Ernst & Young, was instrumental in developing our first business plan, setting up our first accounting system

and providing tax reporting services. At the end of our first year, he came in to do our first year end financial statements and tax returns. I was anxious to know how much we made in that first year. It took Art three days to organize the data and straighten out our bookkeeping records. I kept asking him how much did we make? He would reply be patient, I'm getting there. Finally, at the end of the third day, he called me in to the office and with a big smile on his face, he pounded the desk and exclaimed, “You did it, you did it, you turned a profit in your first year in business”. “How much, how much, what did we make?” I responded. After a slight pause, he reached out to shake my hand, “you made a profit of \$699”.

I almost collapsed. After working 10-12 hours per day six and seven days a week, traveling around the country calling on customers during the week, running machines on the weekends and earning no salary, we made exactly \$699.

*Pat Thompson*

